USTR FACT SHEET

U.S. RESPONSE TO EU BEEF IMPORT BAN

U.S. Exercises its WTO Rights After EU Failure to Comply with WTO Rulings

- The WTO panel and Appellate Body found that the EU ban on U.S. beef from cattle treated with hormones was contrary to WTO provisions. The EU failed to comply with these findings by the WTO deadline of May 13, 1999.

- The United States sought WTO authorization to suspend concessions on EU products, a level of EU trade equivalent to lost U.S. beef exports, estimated by the U.S. as $202 million. The EU alleged that the cost to U.S. exports was only $53 million and requested WTO arbitration.

- On July 12, the WTO arbitrators determined the damage to be $116.8 million. Accordingly, the United States will impose 100 % duties on a list of EU products. The list of products, as well as the effective date of the increased duties, will be announced in the near future.

U.S. Action Taken After Many Years of Trying to Negotiate a Solution

- From 1980-89, the EU debated internally prohibitions on the use of hormones, except for therapeutic purposes. During this period, the United States tried to resolve this issue bilaterally and and multilaterally, including in the GATT.

- During the1990s, the United States continued to try to resolve this dispute, including under the WTO and the FAO Codex Alimentarius.

- Following the 1998 WTO rulings against the EU's hormone regime, the United States offered to label U.S. beef as a way of providing EU consumers an informed choice and to provide the EU additional time to lift its import ban. The EU could provide no assurances that U.S. beef would ever be permitted to be sold in the EU market.

Hormones Pose No Risk To Human Health

- Decades of worldwide scientific studies have shown that consumption of beef from animals produced using the six approved growth-promoting hormones -- estradiol, melengestrol acetate (MGA), progesterone, testosterone, trenbolone acetate, and zeranol -- does not present a risk to human health. U.S. beef is safe.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has researched the effects of growth-promoting hormones for over 40 years and found no associated risks to human health.

- DHHS's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and its Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) and other scientific organizations have found no safety difference for consumers eating beef from animals raised using hormones versus those raised without their use.

- As recently as February 1999, the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) of the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reexamined and confirmed the safety of the three naturally occurring hormones for growth promotant use in cattle. JECFA had done the same for five of the six hormones in 1987.

- Other scientific expert groups – from the 1984 and 1987 Lamming Committee (a scientific expert group formed by the European Commission) to the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods – have repeatedly confirmed the safety of all six hormones.

- FDA has approved the six hormones for use to increase feed efficiency and promote growth in cattle. Prior to approval, the specific conditions of use were extensively evaluated for safety to consumers of meat products.

- The United States has an extensive regulatory control system to ensure the proper use of these hormones. The U.S. system includes comprehensive food safety standards that are based on sound, internationally-recognized scientific criteria.

- Hormones occur naturally in many foods. Consumers are exposed every day to foods with higher hormone levels than those found in any beef from animals treated with hormones.

- Hormone levels (estradiol equivalent) in beef are far less than those found in eggs. A person would need to eat over 6 kilograms of beef from animals treated with these hormones in order to equal the amount of those hormones found in one egg.

- One pint glass of milk from an untreated cow contains about 9 times as much estradiol as a 250 gram portion of meat from a steer raised using hormones.

- Even plants produce the equivalent of sex hormones. Soybeans, wheat germ and broccoli contain high levels of plant estrogens.

- One bowl of split pea soup has more than nine times as much naturally-occurring estrogen as a five-ounce portion of meat from a steer raised using hormones.

Recent EU Reports Uncover No Evidence of Health Risk

- In May, the EU released an "Opinion" about the general safety of hormones and a draft of a report about potential safety questions arising from any misuse of the products. FDA's CVM concluded that these documents contain no new scientific information to challenge the continued approval of the products.

- The EU's Opinion is not consistent with numerous scientific reviews conducted by reputable international organizations, including those mentioned above, and represents a significant departure from the conclusions reached by all previous international review panels.

- The EU's Opinion presents the same material the WTO rejected during the dispute process.

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